

New Mexico Environmental Quality Incentives Program FY 2009 Program Guidance

Local Work Groups

Every Field Office will have a Local Work Group established and hold, at a minimum, one official Local Work Group meeting in preparing for the EQIP program. The Local Work Group will be convened by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and will establish its own working procedures, including:

- Organization
- Decision-making procedure
- Meeting dates, including timely notification of members.
- Recording and distributing Local Work Group considerations, actions and decisions
- Others as deemed necessary

Some Districts may wish to join with other neighboring Districts and have one common local work group.

Membership on the Local Work Group is to include SWCD supervisors, FSA, FSA COC, other federal, state and local agencies, and tribal governments. **District Conservationists are to ensure that the following agencies are provided an invitation to the Local Work Group meetings:**

Federal Agencies (as appropriate)

- US Forest Service - Local Districts
- Bureau of Land Management - Area Managers
- Farm Service Agency - County Executive Directors
- Farm Service Agency County Committees - Chairman
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- US Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies

- Department of Agriculture - Field Representative
- New Mexico Department of Environment - Division Representative
- New Mexico Game and Fish - Regional Representative
- New Mexico State Engineer - Local Representative
- State Land Office - Local Representative
- Irrigation Districts

Local Agencies

- County Extension Service - Extension Agent
- County Government - Commissioner or County Manager
- SWCD Managers

Tribal Governments

- Tribes with land in the Field Office area - Governor/President or other designated representative.

LWGs/DCs are strongly encouraged to hold at least one general stakeholder meeting. The LWG can gather information from the stakeholder meetings and use that information to develop their recommendations. **LWG meetings need to be held and recommendations provided to the Designated Conservationist no later than August 8, 2008.**

Fund Distribution

Each field office that serves one or more Districts will be assigned a pool of funds based on the percent of range land, irrigated land, dry cropland, woodland and animal feeding operations in the District(s). Only one pool of funds will be made per field office and will be made to the Designated Conservationist with the lead responsibility for assisting the District(s). The District Conservationist with lead responsibility will coordinate with any other field office that serves the same District(s). DCs are encouraged to establish local sub-accounts in ProTracts to separate applications under different land uses.

A spreadsheet listing the private, state and tribal acres by agricultural land use, SWCDs and County, was provided to each Designated Conservationist in FY 2003, and has been reviewed annually. The same acreages will be used for FY 2009.

At this time it appears there will be statewide funding pool for Private-Federal Cooperative Grazing Lands. There will also be a state reserve for the Small Acreage and Watershed Initiatives.

Payment Schedules

Payment schedules will be maintained on an area basis. Practice average costs and cost share rates will be uniform on a NRCS area-wide basis. The lead Designated Conservationist for the county must ensure that input is obtained from all District Conservationists, who have service areas in the county. Designated Conservationists are to obtain input from Local Work Groups. Payment schedules will be maintained in eFOTG I, and can be accessed through the state website. *NHQ has already sent a bulletin to states requiring cost information be posted by July 1.* Seth Fiedler is working to meet that deadline. Hopefully, we will still be able to make modifications if needed.

Eligible Practices, Cost Share Rates, Incentive Payments and Practice Caps

Practices listed on the NM website under eFOTG IV are eligible. The Local Work Group should review these practices and make recommendations on which practices should be cost shared in the field office. See guidance in the EQIP Manual. Practice 533 (Pumping Plants) can be used in association with irrigated crop, but only where the applicant is willing to convert from surface to sprinkler or drip systems.

In NM the cost share rate factor for most of the practices will be set at 75%. Local Work Groups should review and recommend the cost share rate for all practices to be included in the local program. (At this time C/S rates are expected to be 75% across the board for WHIP.) Please remember that while practice cost-share rates are used to develop the payment schedule, we should try to avoid using them in discussions with our clients. Our focus is the payment schedule rates.

Local Work Groups have the flexibility to recommend incentive payments for management practices. Incentive payments can only be made to encourage practices that are not commonly accepted in the area. We do anticipate a significant increase in the EQIP budget for FY 2009. *Those FOs with LWGs who have historically preferred not to recommend using a portion of their allocation for land management incentive practices are strongly encouraged to reconsider for FY 2009. With an increased budget you may have a real opportunity to work toward RMS level conservation plans by offering incentives for key land management practices.*

In order to maintain some limits on the amount of financial assistance obligated to certain practices LWGs/DCs may recommend cost caps.

Cost Share Rates For Limited Resource Producers

A cost share rate factor of 90% will be used for all applicants who self-certify they meet the LRP criteria.

Cost Share Rates for Beginning Farmers/Ranchers

A cost share rate factor of 90% will be used for all applicants who self-certify they meet the BF/R criteria.

Coordination across Field Office and State Lines

It is important that the EQIP programs developed at the local level are coordinated across field office and State Lines. While the programs do not have to be identical, there should be much similarity when addressing the same resource concerns. To ensure this coordination, District Conservationists must contact by phone or other method, the District Conservationist in adjoining field offices in New Mexico and in adjoining states. The purpose is to discuss the implementation of EQIP, including: cost-share rates, eligible practices, primary component costs, ranking criteria, etc.

Evaluation Periods

A statewide end of evaluation period has been set for *October 17, 2008*. Because of the need for consistency and coordinating public service announcements across the state we must use a single evaluation period date. Multiple dates would be confusing to our clients. Additional evaluation periods, if necessary, must be approved by the STC.

Ranking Criteria

Local issue questions need to be developed for each approved land use in your FO. If you are comfortable with the local issues developed for FY 2008 and do not want to make any changes for FY 2009 please indicate that in your proposal. If revisions are desired they need to be submitted with your proposal. Area Conservationists may want to consider an area-wide set of local issues for AFOs, Tribal lands, and/or GSWC.

Proposed EQIP Program

Each District Conservationist must submit to the State Conservationist an EQIP proposal on behalf of the Local Work Group for the area to be served. This proposal will be reviewed, and must be approved, by the State Conservationist before the program can begin. **The FY 2009 EQIP proposal is due to the State Conservationist by *August 15, 2008*.**

Information, ranking criteria, payment schedule, etc. for the field office program, once approved, will be published on the state web site for access by the public. We also need to be consistent in the information provided for each FO. Using the template (**attachment #4**) when preparing your proposal is required.

Proposals submitted in a different format will be returned!

Ground and Surface Water Conservation Provisions

This component of EQIP has been replaced by the new 'Agricultural Water Enhancement Program' (AWEP). The program objectives are essentially the same. We anticipate New Mexico will receive funds under the AWEP, and that the regulations will be very similar. Whether or not we will be able to manage AWEP exactly in the same manner as GSWC is not clear at this time. We hope to provide additional guidance in the near future.

Local Watershed Initiative

A pool of funds will be available to provide additional FA fund assistance to LWGs/DCs who propose, and are selected for, a local watershed initiative. If your LWG recommends submitting a proposal, please complete **attachment #3** and submit as part of your overall EQIP FO proposal.

Small Acreage Initiative

A pool of funds will be available to provide additional FA fund assistance to LWGs/DCS who propose, and are selected for, a small acreage initiative. If your LWG recommends submitting a proposal, please complete **attachment #3** and submit as part of your overall EQIP FO proposal.

Timelines: FO need to complete each activity in the schedule of activities/deadlines by the date indicated. If a problem/issue arises that may prevent meeting a deadline, Area Conservationists need to be notified as far in advance as possible to discuss alternatives. **Attachment #1** of this bulletin provides the list of activities/deadlines for FY 2009.